NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER.

MR. AMBROSE'S LETTERS.

LETTER VI.

REVOLUTION.

MARCH, 1863.

The aspiration of Southern ambition, which has reached to the climax of rebellion, was not the growth of a month or a year. Those who have watched the course of public events and noted the development of opinion in the South for years past have seen many signs of the coming peril; and, if the country was not prepared for it, it was not for want of an occasional warning. Every body knew there were restless spirits in the South who would rejoice in the opportunity to destroy the Union, and that these were endeavoring to create a sectional sentiment that might favor the accomplishment of their wish. But the common faith of the country in the patriotism of the people of the South, and the profound conviction of the whole North, and we may say also of the larger part of the Southern communities, that no motive existed which could possibly stir up the people of any State to the mad enterprise of assailing the integrity of the Union, dispelled every apprehension on this score. The public generally regarded the danger as a chimera. Even the Government, which ought to have been distrustful enough to put itself on guard, seemed to be utterly unconscious of the gathering trouble. Never was a country taken so much at unawares.

The year 1860 was one of great prosperity. The nation exhibited something more than its customary light-heartedness, and had risen into a tone of hilarity from the peculiar excitements of the year. The spring was occupied with celebrations of the advent of the Japanese Embassy, which signalized the enlargement of our commerce with the East, and autumn was filled with pageants to welcome the heir of the British throne, whose visit was regarded as an event of national congratulation that promised long peace and happy fellowship with the world—a token of new strength and greater influence to the Republic. It was a year distinguished by public demonstrations of faith and hope in the future destiny of the country. Few persons were willing to believe, or allowed themselves to think, that, whilst we were thus increasing the popularity of the nation abroad and inaugurating an era of remarkable promise to the advantage of our foreign and domestic interests, there was any considerable party amongst us who could harbor the parricidal design of crushing these brilliant hopes in the destruction of the country itself, or that the band of political agitators, to whom the public was accustomed to impute such a design, could so infatuate their followers as to prevail with them to attempt it. It was in this state of confident security, and in the very midst of these peaceful manifestations, that the storm broke upon the country. Never was a nation so utterly unprepared for such an event.

Notwithstanding this dissonance between the tone of public feeling at that time, and the terrific incident which grated upon it with such inopportune discord, the rebellion was a predestined fact which came at its appointed day. The year, the month, almost the week of its explosion had been determined in councils held long before, and the plot had no regard to the barometer of national sentiment, indifferent alike to the good will which delights in establishing peace, or that more congenial mood which promotes quarrel.

It was foreordained that the Presidential election of 1860 should furnish, not the occasion, but the day of dissolution.

Let us endeavor to extract from the history of the times and our own observation of the character of our people what we can find to solve this problem. It has grown to be almost a universally accepted fact on the northern side of Mason and Dixon's line that slavery is the cause of the rebellion. This is so broadly received that the corrollary derived from it seems, at this time, to be the axiom upon which the special friends of the Administration are endeavoring to direct the conduct of the war to put the rebellion down. Slavery being the cause of the rebellion, the war, it is said, must be aimed at the extinction of slavery. With them it would appear to be no longer a point to compel the insurgents to submit to the laws and return to their allegiance; but rather to act on the assumption that no peace is desirable which leaves slavery an existing institution.

I think this view of the origin of our troubles requires some qualification. Slavery, of itself and for itself, is not the cause of the rebellion. I do not believe that there was one intelligent, leading, and thinking man in the South, when this rebellion broke out, who imagined that slavery was in any kind of danger either from the action of the National Government or the State Governments; nor that it could be successfully assailed by the hostility that was exhibited against it in the public or private opinion of Northern society. I think that astute Southern statesmen were and are perfectly convinced that the Government of the United States, embracing both National and State organizations, afforded an impregnable security to the institution of slavery which no power on this continent, in its lawful course of administration, could disturb. And, moreover, that the guarantees which these organizations combined offer to that institution are not only entirely adequate to its protection, but are such as no government ever before supplied, and such, also, as no government, of the same scope of jurisdiction and power, would ever again agree to make. It is the merest sham and make-believe for any Southern man to pretend that the institution of slavery was ever brought into peril before this rebellion exposed it to the dangers that now surround it. I can hardly suppose that any man of sense in the South could believe otherwise than that a war, once provoked between the States, would be the only effective agency which could destroy or impair it against the will and without the co-operation of the Slave States themselves.

Slavery may be said to be the cause of the rebellion only in the same sense in which we may affirm that cotton and sugar are the cause of it, or that Southern character, habits, climate, and social life are the source out of which it has sprung.

The agitations of the slave question were only ostensibly the motives to rebellion. They were the means made use of to give pretext and consistency to the scheme. With the unthinking or excitable masses of the South, it is true, these agitations were the principal incentives to revolt. They furnished them a ready argument, and made the threat of breaking up the Union familiar to the Southern mind, and, to a certain extent, popular. They had something of the same effect upon portions of the people of the North; for the aversion to the Union was not alone harbored in the South. I have no doubt that the extreme opinions on this subject, preached and written by a sect in New England, had a most pernicious influence in extending the thought of dissolution through the South. There was an equal fanaticism on both sides, quite as evident in favor of slavery in one section as against it in the other. Secessionists and abolitionists, in the ultra phases of their respective demands, were in full accord as to the ultimate remedy of the grievances they imagined themselves to suffer. It was curious to see how, in ascending the gamut of their opposite extravagances, the two parties kept pace with each other on the scale of which the highest note on each side was disunion. Both North and South were, at the beginning, in harmony in admitting slavery to be a social evil which was to be considerately dealt with and abandoned when that could be done without injury to existing interests. From this point Southern enthusiasts diverged in one direction, Northern in another. With one slavery rose to be asserted successively as a harmless utility, as a blessing, a divine institution, and, finally, as "the corner-stone rejected by the builders," upon which a new dynasty was to be constructed, and our old cherished Union to be dashed into fragments. With the other, slavery, passing through equal grades, was declared to be a disgrace; a great national sin; a special curse of Heaven, and, at last, a stigma that made the Union "a covenant of hell," which, therefore, should be shattered to atoms to give place to another order of polity. The two opposite lines thus converged in the same point, that of dissolution. This is the extreme boundary to which a passionate monomania has at last conducted the agitations of thirty years of the subject of slavery. The irritation produced by this persevering and angry reverberation of the question, from side to side, undoubtedly prepared the people of the South for the explosion of 1860, and equally prepared the people of the North for a prompt resentment against it, and thus misled the popular opinion on both sides to regard the slavery question as the immediate source of the attempt at revolution. But the contrivers, the heads and leaders of the scheme, had a much deeper purpose than the redress of any imagined danger to the security of the institution. They only took advantage of the common sensibility of their people on this subject to aid them in a design of much wider import.

We may find a guide to our investigation of this design in a review of the composition and character of Southern society.

It is not always a gracious task to analyze national character, and particularly when our own countrymen are in question. If, therefore, I should be thought too "candid" in what I am about to write, I hope I shall find my warrant in the sincere respect I entertain for the many excellent traits of Southern character, and still more in the esteem with which I cherish the memory of many personal friends in whom I have found every thing to admire and really nothing to blame—except, indeed, the facility with which they have yielded to the delusion which carried them into this rebellion

If I were asked to describe in a word the primal source or germ out of which this commotion has sprung, I would say it was the egotism of Southern character. There are no people in the world who have a higher opinion of themselves and of their surroundings than the inhabitants of certain districts of the South. They are accustomed to speak of themselves as possessing the very highest type of civilization; as pre-eminent in all the qualities of generous manhood; as hospitable, frank, brave beyond all other people; quick to resent dishonor; keen in their perception of what is great or noble; refined and elegant in manners. They claim, besides, superior talent, more acute insight, and higher energy than their neighbors. They are prolific in statesmen, orators, and politicians. They are manly, truthful, and *chevalresque*. This is the portrait they draw of themselves.

Now, I do not mean to dispute these pretensions. The South possesses, in marked degree, many of these excellent qualities, and I would not disparage their claim to any of them, because I think that the very assertion of such a claim is the proof of an appreciation of these virtues, which in itself is a merit of good omen. It shows the tendency of their aspirations, which is one good step towards success in accomplishing them. But, on the other hand, we may remark that this self-esteem, whilst it exalts its possessors, is apt in the same degree to breed opinions derogatory of all other people outside of their boundary. The South accordingly has its aversions, and amongst these nothing is more conspicuous than the dislike of the common masses of the Southern people—I speak more particularly of the untravelled portion of them—to the natives of the New England States. This dislike is as old as the colonial era. Even in the Revolutionary war of 1776, if it did not impair the sturdy union of effort which won the victory, it bred minor dissensions and vexatious jealousies. The application of the word "Yankee" was even then, as it is now, an expression of the derision with which the man of the South regarded the man of New England. It signified at that day, and long afterwards, in the vulgar apprehension, a shrewd, cunning chapman, who invariably outwitted the credulous Southron in a bargain. It has lost something of this significance in these later times, since the credulous Southron has grown more worldly, and developed some of the qualities of an expert chapman himself. It now rather indicates the hatred engendered by jealousy of New England growth and prosperity.

In a sober estimate of all these characteristics, which it is hardly necessary to say are not to be attributed to the most cultivated and liberal men of the South, we may set down both the self-esteem and the aversion I have described to the account of that provincial vanity and prejudice which are always observed in isolated communities, and which, I think, are also, in some degree, distinctive of a simply agricultural people.

This popular dislike of the North, unreasonable and trivial as it is, has had a good deal to do with the aggravation of the temper which has fomented the rebellion. It quickened the jealousy of the South against every political movement in the country that indicated the probability of Northern control in the Government. Every revelation made by the census of the growing preponderance of Northern population—by which I mean the population of the Free States in general—was received by the South as the announcement of a rapidly advancing era when Southern domination must give way to Northern—when the sceptre must depart from Judah. I think we have very clear proof that at no time since the adoption of the Constitution were the politicians of the South disposed to tolerate the election of a Northern President, unless they had a satisfactory assurance that he would administer the Government in obedience to their dictation, or at least conformably to their views of policy. In the time of the elder Adams there was a settled, and even an exasperated opposition to him, which threatened to break up the Government, on this ground. Mr. Jefferson evidently alluded to this scheme, in his letter to John Taylor of Caroline, in 1798, in which he wrote an argument to discourage it—manifestly as an answer to some suggestions on that subject from his correspondent. His argument, I may remark, in passing, was equally against the right and the policy of such a proceeding. Referring to the "scission of the Union" as a supposed lawful resort, he declares that with it "no Federal Government could ever exist." There are many proofs now extant besides this of the reluctance of the Southern States to allow any influence but their own to predominate in the Government, even in that age of our republic when it was not pretended that any Southern right was brought into jeopardy either by the National or State authorities or by the temper of private opinion. The objection to Northern rule was simply founded on the pride of Southern ambition.

It is only necessary to reflect upon the restiveness of Southern politicians of the last and the present generation, and to observe the solicitude with which they have always contemplated any invasion of their own supremacy in the Government, and the importunate zeal with which they have insisted upon preserving an equilibrium between Free and Slave States—meaning by that, the *preponderance* of Southern influence—to be convinced that the perpetuity of their control of the Administration has been the leading idea of their policy. The threat of disunion has been the customary persuasion by which they have, from time to time, endeavored to subdue the first symptoms of disaffection to their ascendancy. This had become the familiar terror of every Presidential canvass since the great flurry of nullification in 1832, and, in fact, its frequency had made it so stale that when, at last, the danger was really imminent, the country was incredulous of the event, as much from derision of the threat as a worn-out trick, as from the common conviction that no cause had arisen to provoke it.

Looking at the various pretexts upon which, as occasion prompted, this disunion was threatened—the tariff, the navigation laws, the distribution of patronage, the Texas question, the admission of California, the Kansas organization, the Territories—all of which have been used in turn by the Cotton States to frighten the nation with the danger of rupture, we have in these the most perspicuous guide to the true motives of the breach of 1861. The fact was then at last demonstrated that the hour was at hand when other interests in the country were to have a hearing and an influence, and that the majority of the nation meant to govern it; that the South must take its due and proper place in the Union and relinquish its ambition of undivided empire. That long-feared and long-warded-off day had come, and with it came the first, real, unfeigned, absolute purpose of the partisan politicians of the Southern States in combination to separate the South from the North, and to attempt to build up a power at home, in which Southern politics and Southern ambition should have undisputed sway. The Union was enjoyed as long as it ministered to the ascendency of the Planting States, but was to be cast off as soon as the nation reached that epoch in its progress at which it was able to release itself from the thraldom of sectional control, and to regulate its policy in accordance with the demands of the general welfare.

Never was the selfishness, which is the proverbial sin of politicians and the common imputation against corporate bodies, which the nobler qualities of individual manhood scorns and the morality of social life condemns, more conspicuously illustrated than in this example furnished by a people who boast not less of their honor than of their statesmanship During a period of seventy years the oldest of these States—and the younger from the date of their organization—had drawn from the Union a power and prosperity they never could have obtained alone. It is not too much to affirm that they are indebted to the Union for every thing which has made their position in the eye of the world worthy of consideration as a national Power. To the Union the greater part of them owe their very existence: all owe to it their protection and defence, their flourishing commerce, their ready and cheap supply of manufactures, their conveniences of luxurious or comfortable life: they owe to the Union in great degree their internal improvements, and in no small proportion their most active and intelligent population. And now, conceiving that they have attained to a strength which will enable them to secure these advantages from their own resources, they do not hesitate to renounce their most sacred obligations of duty and obedience for the illusion of a national independence, which, whatever may be its import upon their own fortunes, they persuade themselves cannot be any thing else than destruction to the prosperity of the comrades they seek to abandon.

It is lamentable to see this false estimate of duty in any section, but our regret is increased by the surprise with which we discover so many persons in the Border States who have allowed themselves to think that, in following the lead of these counsellors, they will ever find any adequate compensation for the sacrifice they make of the long career of happy fortune opened to them by the protection of the Union.

What, we are now ready to ask, is the real motive for seeking this independence? Can it be for any advantage which a State of the Union, and especially any State within the compass of the old thirteen, could lawfully and honorably demand from its associates in the Confederacy?

In the adoption of the Constitution there was a plighted faith volunteered by every member of the Union to observe and keep every covenant expressed in that instrument. Each State relied upon the faith and honor of its sister State, and upon the pledge of the whole people of the United States to abide by the terms of that great compact, and to perform every duty it exacted of them. In fraternal reliance upon that honor, each and every State committed itself to all the responsibilities the Union imposed. Each willingly assumed these responsibilities, in full confidence that no one would ever shrink from its share in the participation of the common duty, but that all would religiously discharge every obligation of the compact. There was thus a perfect assurance given to the nation that whilst all enjoyed the profit, the prosperity, and the glory of the Union, all would equally adopt its burdens, and make whatever necessary sacrifice of individual or State advantage the common good might require. This is, in effect, the nature of the social compact presented by the Constitution Certainly, we may say that, after entering into such an engagement as this, no State nor section of the people could, without great dishonor and breach of faith, refuse and abandon the performance of their stipulated obligations to their compeers, merely for the sake of making themselves independent. Even if there were an admitted right to retire, every consideration of justice would impose upon the malcontent fragment the duty of appealing to the rest who composed the body politic for their consent to a measure which must necessarily be an injury to them. How much more imperative is the duty of such an appeal when no such right to withdraw is contained in the compact, and when the proceeding, unless sanctioned by the general consent of the nation, could only be classed in the category of revolution? To make a decent case of justification for revolution, every tribunal of moral law or enlightened opinion would hold that, as a preliminary fact, that consent should be asked and refused; and, moreover, that the insurgent party should be able to show such a violation of compact by the offending Government as to produce intolerable oppression for which no remedy was to be found but that of separation.

Now, nothing is more clear than that neither of these conditions existed. There was no consent sought for or expected, but, on the contrary, a haste in rushing into rebellion, which one might almost believe was intended to prevent the risk of either consent or conciliation. The conductors of the movement seemed to think, in the words of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, "The quarrel is a very pretty quarrel as it stands—we should only spoil it by trying to explain it" There was no intolerable oppression, or indeed oppression of any kind. The utmost point to which any mover of the sedition went, was to affirm that it was feared there might be some oppression hereafter—though that was not very intelligibly made out in the result of the Presidential election, which proved the successful party to be in a minority of the whole vote of the country. We had heard, it is true, a great deal about the iniquity of import duties and protection of domestic industry; but these were only the common resources of all Governments, and indeed, when it concerned Southern interests, where the special requisitions of Southern policy, which always insisted on the protection of sugar and cotton, and in past times demanded the highest duties on manufactures, as exemplified in the recommendation of the minimum principle which was introduced into the tariff of 1816 by Mr. Calhoun, with the express view of encouraging the manufacture of American cotton in order exclude India fabrics from our market. We had heard a complaint that the bounty of the Government had fallen in stinted measure upon the South in the expenditures of the revenue; but the fact was that the public treasure was applied in that section to the establishment of forts, arsenals, navy yards, hospitals, custom-houses, mints, and other public structures, quite as liberally as they were needed, and certainly without any idea of unjust discrimination; whilst, in addition to these expenditures, enormous amounts, far greater than were appropriated to any other section, were expended in the purchase and defence of Southern territory.

It might be pertinently asked here, in reference to these complaints, did the South, by asserting its independence, expect to escape the necessity of raising revenue without a resort to imposts? Did it enter into their plan to abandon the protection of sugar, the manufacture of iron, of copper, of cotton, wool, leather, glass, or the many other commodities to which Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, and other parts of the South are now devoting capital, with anticipation of future enlargement? Would they be willing to hazard the experiment of refusing the demands of those States on this subject—with that swift remedy of secession acknowledged as a power in their organization?

I need say nothing here of the preservation of slave institutions as a motive to independence; I have already commented on that point; but I may add a few words on the extension of slavery into the Territories, which has latterly been presented as a question of injustice done to the South. In regard to that, I have to remark that the recent demand was for the right to plant slavery north of the latitude of 36° 30′—the South had already secured the privilege south of that line, where every foot of territory was by law open to the admission of slavery.

It is a very notable fact that, from the beginning of the Government, Southern statesmen have refused to allow slavery to go north of that line in the Territories. The Northwestern territory, embracing all the States north of the line, was made inviolably free soil by the demand of Virginia and the support of Southern votes. The Missouri compromise was also a Southern measure, and its passage was hailed as the triumph of the South over the North. But was there really any wish to plant slavery north of that line? Is there a man of the South who would have engaged in such an adventure, if the prohibition of the Missouri compromise had never been made? What inducement can be imagined which would persuade a Southern planter to abandon his productive sugar or cotton field and to transport his slaves into the rigorous climate and to the ungenial cultivation of that grain-producing region, which is thronged with free emigrants, under whose competition slave labor falls to a mere cipher?

And, after all, I close this questioning with one more interrogatory: Would independence help this privilege, supposing it were of any value; would the Territories be open to slave settlement after the South had renounced the Union, and its projected revolution—if that were a destined event—had become a success?

Pursue this inquiry through all the details it may suggest, and when you have exhausted your catechism you will find that the whole of these supposed motives for independence are utterly baseless; that they are simply pretexts and nothing more, employed as lures to entrap the ignorant or as topics to feed the sedition of men who welcome any thing that may seem like argument to sustain a foregone purpose of revolt.

The pursuit of independence by these Confederated States has a very different aim from the redress of such shallow griefs as these.

Whoever shall be able hereafter to reveal the secret history of those various conclaves which have held counsel on the repeated attempts to invade and conquer—or, as the phrase was, liberate Cuba; whoever shall unfold the schemes of seizing Nicaragua, of aiding revolution in Mexico, of possessing Sonora, will make some pretty sure advances in disclosing the true pathway to the sources of this rebellion. The organization of the Knights of the Golden Circle, and their spread over the country; their meetings and transactions; who managed them and set them on to do their appointed work; whoever shall penetrate into the midnight which veiled this order from view, will also open an authentic chapter in the history of this outbreak.

There was a great scheme of dominion in this plot. The fancy of certain Southern politicians was dazed with a vision of Empire. Years have been rolling on whilst this brilliant scheme was maturing in their private councils and at intervals startling the nation by some unexpected eruption. The design, which lay too deep in darkness to be penetrated by the uninitiated, occasionally rose to the surface in some bold and rash adventure, which either the vigilance of Government or the imperfect means of success which the necessity of concealment imposed upon it rendered abortive. The Cuban expeditions miscarried; the Sonora failed; the Nicaragua forays were defeated—all these chiefly by the careful watch of the Government. Large sums of money were squandered in these fruitless adventures, and many lives were lost Worse than these mishaps, eager hopes were disappointed and long-indulged dreams dissipated. It was found that the Union was in the way; that the Federal Government was the impediment, and, that as long as the South was bound to obey that Government, frustration of these cherished schemes was always sure to attend them. This experience bred the hostility of thwarted ambition against the Union, and turned the thoughts of these agents of mischief towards its destruction.

Then came the next movement. There is, I think, a better foundation than mere rumor for saying that overtures were made, before the rebellion broke out, to the Emperor of the French for support and patronage in the scheme; that a very alluring picture was presented to him of a great Southern Confederacy, to embrace the land of cotton, of sugar, of coffee, of the most precious tobaccoes, and of the choicest fruits, of the most valuable timber and the richest mines—comprehending the Gulf States, Cuba, St. Domingo, and other islands, Mexico, Central America, and perhaps reaching even beyond into the borders of South America—a great tropical and semi-tropical paradise of unbounded affluence of product, secured by an impregnable monopoly created by nature. This large domain was to be organized into one Confederate Government, and provid d with the cheapest and most docile and submissive of all labor; its lands were to be parcelled into principalities, and landlords were to revel in the riches of Aladdin's lamp. This was the grand idea which the Emperor was solicited to patronise with his protection, for which he was to be repaid in treaty arrangements by which France should enjoy a free trade in the products of French industry, and precedence in gathering the first fruits of all this wealth of culture. Certainly a very dazzling lure this to the good will of the Emperor!

It is said the Emperor was quite captivated with the first view of this brilliant project, but on riper deliberation was brought to a pause. The scheme, he discovered, stood on one leg: the whole structure rested on slavery, which was much too ricketty a support to win favor in this nineteenth century with the shrewdest of European statesmen. The plot was "too light for the counterpoise of so great an opposition." The structure might last a few years, but very soon it would tumble down and come to nought. And so, it is whispered, the Emperor declined the venture. This is a bit of secret history which time may or may not verify. From some inklings of that day which escaped into open air, I believe it true. We heard various boastings in the summer of 1860 of French support to the threatened separation, and there were agents in Europe negotiating for it. During all that preliminary period, there was a great deal said in the South about reviving the slave trade. When the Emperor refused this was suddenly dropped, and England was then looked to as the ally in the coming revolt. Abolition England was to be won by another strategy. The Montgomery Convention asserted a clause in the Confederate Constitution forbidding the slave trade, and, oddly enough for a Government founded on the central idea of slavery, the commissioners who represented it in England were authorized to assure the British Minister that it was really the old Government which was fighting to perpetuate slavery, whilst the new one was only seeking free trade; thereby gently insinuating a disinterested indifference on the slave question which might ultimately come into full accord with England on that subject. These revelations stand in strange contrast with the popular theme that has rushed so many into the rebellion. As the matter now rests the rebel Government has quite platform enough to be as pro-slavery or as anti-slavery as its European negotiations may require; and if these should utterly fail, there is nothing in the constitutional provision to interrupt the African slave trade a single day. For what is that provision worth in a region where neither courts nor juries would execute the law?

Whilst this grand idea of tropical extension was seething in the brain of the leaders, and their hopes of fruition were vivid, the plan was to confine the revolt to the Cotton States—or, at least, to give the Border States a very inferior rôle in the programme. They might come in when all was adjusted, but were to have no share in the primary organization. Every one remembers how these Border States were flouted in the beginning, and told they were not fit to be consulted, and that the only advantage they could bring to the Southern Confederacy was that of serving as a frontier to prevent the escape of slaves. But when the original plan was found to be a failure the views of the managers were changed; the Border States became indispensable to any hope of success, and the most active agencies of persuasion, force, and fraud were set in motion to bring them in. How mournfully did it strike upon the heart of the nation when Virginia, in the lead of this career of submission, sank to the humiliation of pocketing the affront that had been put upon her, and consented to accept a position which nothing but the weakness of her new comrades induced them to allow her!

Since the hope of this broader dominion has come to an end, the rebellion is still persistently pursued for the accomplishment of its secondary objects. There is still doubtless some residuary expectation that, even without foreign patronage, in the event of success, this desire of extension of territory may in time be gratified; but it is no longer the chief object of pursuit. The pride of the South, its resentment, its rage are all now enlisted in pushing forward to whatever consummation they may imagine to be attainable. They now insist on independence from the very hatred their disappointments have engendered. But they seek it, too, as the only method left for the maintenance of that class domination which they have ever enjoyed, and which they are now unwilling to surrender.

PAUL AMBROSE.

PRIZE CASES AT NEW YORK.

A general investigation in regard to the prize cases that have been disposed of in the port of New York during the past two years is now in progress in that city. The preliminary movement was made on Wednesday, when Mr. JOURDON, the solicitor of the Treasury, had an interview with several merchants and other citizens. The taking of testimony was to begin yesterday. The Evening Post says:

"The inquiry is to include the whole subject, and the acts of all persons who have had any thing to do, directly or indirectly, with the prize cases; their adjudication and the sale of the goods, either as agents of the Government or as private individuals, will be passed in review. Much time will doubtless be consumed, but the importance of the subject, both to the Government and the captors, demands that the inquiry be made thorough. The comparatively large expenses of disposing of the prize goods here has, of course, led to the investigation."

McCLELLAN'S DEFENCE OF WASHINGTON.

A CONTROVERTED POINT SETTLED.

The Boston Daily Advertiser of Saturday last, the 25th instant, has the following notice of a Report recently made to Gen. BARRY, Inspector of Artillery, by Gen. WM. B. GREENE, lately commanding the Fourteenth Massachusetts, (Heavy Artillery.) The facts here stated are important as bearing on a controverted question, some of the papers relating to which appeared in several of our numbers during the month of January last, and which has been frequently alluded to in other articles since that time.

From the Boston Daily Advertiser of April 25th.

Col. WILLIAM B. GREENE, lately commanding the Fourteenth Massachusetts, (Heavy Artillery,) has made his report to Gen. Barry, inspector of artillery.

As Col. Greene was for some months in command of a brigade of artillery in the forts covering Washington south of the Potomac, his report is of interest and importance, especially in its bearing upon the state of defence in which Washington was left at the beginning of the peninsula campaign, a point which is much labored, it will be remembered, by the Committee on the Conduct of the War. Col. Greene is led to discuss this matter from a reflection apparently (and perhaps unwittingly) cast upon the fine regiment under his command by Gen. Wadsworth. Col. Greene says:

"I read with astonishment the following paragraph from the communication of Gen. Wadsworth to the Secretary of War, dated Washington, April 2, 1862, and reproduced in the report of the Committee on the Conduct of the War. I confess that I am not able to comprehend it:

"'Two heavy artillery regiments and one infantry regiment, which had been drilled for some months in artillery service, have been withdrawn from the forts on the south side of the Potomac, and I have only been able to fill their places with very new infantry regiments entirely unacquainted with the duties of that arm, and of little or no value in their present position.'

"One of the heavy artillery regiments referred to was, probably, the First Connecticut, which was relieved, pursuant to Gen. Wordsworth's orders, by the regiment of Massachusetts artillery under my command, and not by a very new regiment of infantry. Gen. Wadsworth's order directing me to relieve Col. Tyler specified that the Connecticut regiment was one of artillery, but designated the Massachusetts regiment of artillery as merely 'the Fourteenth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers.' He appears to have thought that the Fourteenth Massachusetts regiment which reported to him was not one of the oldest volunteer heavy artillery regiments, but a very new regiment of infantry. I am under the impression that the Massachusetts Fourteenth was the senior volunteer heavy artillery regiment in the service, and inferior to no other either in drill or discipline.

"The infantry regiment which is referred to as one that had been drilled in artillery service was, I suppose, the one that had vacated Forts Craig and Tillinghast—the New York 12th, I think, but am not sure, since I never had any thing to do with Craig and Tillinghast until they were vacated. As soon as they were vacated I occupied them of my own motion, and without waiting for orders During the whole time that Gen. Wadsworth commanded the defences of Washington the 14th Massachusetts Volunteers (heavy artillery) occupied the forts that had been occupied by the 1st Connecticut artillery, and also Forts Craig and Tillinghast; during that whole time no infantry whatever—whether very new or of any other quality—formed any part of the garrisons of those forts. The only infantry that I saw at the time in forts south of the Potomac was the 56th Pennsylvania volunteers, which Gen. Wadsworth ordered to report to me, and which I was authorized by him (verbally through my ordnance officer) to distribute in Forts Albany, Runyon, and Jackson to reinforce the garrisons from the Massachusetts 14th, which already occupied those forts. The Pennsylvania 56th remained on the south side of the Potomac but five or six days, as they were ordered away to Budd's ferry almost immediately after they had been distributed among the forts."

It appears, therefore, that Gen. Wadsworth, in his alarm, and perhaps under the pressure of the heavy responsibility belonging to the commander of the defences of Washington, fell into a very singular error in making the statement which was the foundation of such important action afterwards. He supposed two artillery regiments had been withdrawn when only one had been, and that raw infantry had been put in garrison, when in fact the regiment withdrawn was replaced by perhaps the oldest and one of the best drilled regiments of artillery in the service, no infantry whatever, except one regiment for a few days, being placed in garrison. How many other errors of similar character Gen. Wadsworth's statement may contain, in particulars which have not yet received such an examination as Col. Greene has given to the part which falls within his personal knowledge, the public must judge; but the value of the General's statement is very easily estimated.

How Gen. Wadsworth came to make such a serious mistake as this is easily explained. Finding that the General classes the Fourteenth with "very new infantry," "entirely unacquainted" with artillery, Col. Greene refers with some pride to the history of his regiment, to the high compliments which it received from many leading Generals, including Gen. Barry, for its discipline and proficiency in artillery drill, and then adds to a list of these officers this remarkable statement;

"I wish I could add the name of Gen. Wadsworth to this list, but am unable to do so because his duties in Washington were so engrossing that he had apparently little time to visit the forts on the south of the Potomac. When Gen. Wadsworth commanded the defences of Washington he never, to my knowledge, inspected any one of my forts, or reviewed any one of my companies; and I think it would have been impossible for him to do either of those things without my knowledge. It is my impression that Gen. Wadsworth was never, while he was my commanding officer, inside my lines. Major Buxton, commander of the permanent guard on Long Bridge, inform d me that Gen. Wadsworth, while he was in command of the defences of Washington, never once crossed Long Bridge. No staff officer of Gen. Wadsworth ever inspected, to my knowledge, any one of my forts. It would gratify me exceedingly to be able to refer to the testimony of Gen. Wadsworth in favor of the discipline and instruction of my regiment, but I am precluded from so doing by the fact of his never having taken personal cognizance of the condition of my forts and of the instruction and discipline of my men."

Gen. Wadsworth is reported to have testified to the Committee on the Conduct of the War that, at the departure of the army for the peninsula, not a single gun "on wheels" was left for the defence of Washington. To this whimsical statement, which was gravely repeated in the Senate, Col Greene makes a reply, as regards his command, equally conclusive, whether we suppose Gen. Wadsworth, in his innocence of military knowledge at that time, to have been ignorant that all the guns must have been "on wheels," or to have merely sought in an unskilful way to say that no field artillery was left for use:

"I had, in eight of the forts covering Long Bridge (which were under my command) some seventy or more cannon 'on wheels'—I think the exact number was seventy-two. Some of these cannon were mounted, it is true, on barbette carriages, but, after all, barbette carriages have 'wheels. Not one of the seventy two cannon was without its carriage. The cannon mounted on barbette carriages were 32-pounder guns, 24-pounder guns, and 8-inch howitzers; those mounted on siege carriages were 24-pounder iron guns and 30 pounder Parrott guns. I had fifteen field guns—counting 5½-inch brass howitzers and 10-pounder Parrott guns as well as 6-pounder field guns to make up the number. I had, also, several 20-pounder Parrott guns on field carriages. My Quartermaster had also in his charge a hundred or more excellent horses, which we had brought from Massachusetts. I thought myself liable to be called on, at any moment, to furnish a field battery, and, for that reason kept myself constantly prepared to furnish one of six pieces at an hour's notice. I had the cannon, the ammunition, the horses, the men, and the officers, and the battery would have been organized and trotted out whenever called for. Whatever might have been wanting, as for example a battery wagon and caissons, could, I suppose, have been readily furnished from the Arsenal at Washington. That I had these cannon, horses, men, etc. will appear from the returns and reports which were at the time regularly forwarded by me to the headquarters of the general commanding the defences of Washington, (Gen. Wadsworth.")

CAPTURE OF A GUERILLA LEADER.

Col. McReynolds, of the First New York Cavalry, in a despatch to Gen Kelley, announces the capture of the "notorious" Capt. Laypole on the night of the 21st instant, near the foot of the Blue Ridge. The Colonel says:

"I learned of his haunting place, set a trap for him; sent thirty picket men across the river, three at a time, at midnight, and caught him and seven men of the Fifth and Sixth Virginia rebel cavalry. There is a general rejoicing at the capture of this bold villain, and Lieut. Powell and his brave men of the Twelfth Virginia Infantry, with Lieut. Wycoff, of the First New York Cavalry, (ever reliable,) are entitled to all the credit. It was a bold dash and nobly executed."

A STRANGE MILITARY ORDER.

The following military order appeared in the "Independent Democrat," published at Concord, (N. H.) on the 26th ultimo, with the brief remark that "the order speaks for itself and makes a good beginning; there are other officers who should be dealt with likewise."

War Department, Adjutant General's Office,
Washington, March 13, 1862.

Special Orders No. 119. [Extract]

34. By direction of the President the following officers are hereby dismissed the service of the United States: Lieutenant A. J. Edgerly, Fourth New Hampshire Volunteers, for circulating "copperhead tickets," and doing all in his power to promote the success of the rebel cause in his State.

By order of the Secretary of War:

L. THOMAS, Adjutant General.

To the Governor of New Hampshire.

The New Hampshire election took place on the 10th of March. The order is dated on the 13th, and, doubting its genuineness, we hesitated to give it the place in our columns to which a legitimate paper of the kind would have been entitled. But, learning from a late number of the "Independent Democrat," justifying this act of the military power, as well as from other evidence before us, that the order is really genuine, and that the original is on file in the State House at Concord, we now republish it as one of the remarkable incidents of this unfortunate war, together with the lately-published explanation of the dismissed officer in which its justice is denied.

Letter from Lieut. Edgerly.

MANCHESTER, (N. H.) MARCH 28, 1863.

Editors of the Boston Post: I saw in your issue of today the order dismissing Lieut. A. J. Edgerly, of the Fourth New Hampshire Volunteers, from the service of the United States for "circulating copperhead tickets," together with your comments thereon, in which you say you cannot believe it true that the President of the United States would stoop so low as to dismiss an officer for voting the Democratic ticket, or even circulating tickets, when it is a notorious fact that the Administration had their officers and men brought from all parts of the country, not only to vote for the Republican party, but use all their influence to have others do the same and for the same party.

Why I write this is to show to you that the order is genuine, although I have not been officially notified of it, but have seen the original copy in the State Department at Concord, and shall probably get a copy when the printed one is issued. I do not wonder that you are loth to believe it true, for many of the leading Republicans here, those who believe the dismissal merited if the charge is true, do not believe they would stoop to the low party-slang phrases at the War Department in their "orders;" but such are the words used in the order, word for word, as published in the "Democrat" at Concord.

I send you a copy of a certificate given me by the Moderator of the Ward in which I voted, (ward six,) and he is one of the most influential men of the Republican party, and one of the editors of the "American" in this city, which goes to show the first part of the charge is false, and as for the other I am at a loss to know what is meant by "the rebel cause in his State," unless it is the Abolition cause, and every man who ever knew me, or ever heard me express my political opinions, knows I never did any thing to help that, but have voted the Democratic ticket since 1850, with the exception of last March, when I was in Florida with my regiment.

The facts are these: I simply went to the polls and deposited my ballot, as I considered I had a perfect right to do, not thinking that when I took a commission in the United States army I forfeited the dearest right of an American freeman, the right to exercise the elective franchise according to the dictates of his own judgment and conscience; and I do not regret the act, and should do so again to-morrow should the opportunity occur.

You will pardon me for the freedom I have taken in writing this to you, not for publication, only to show that the "order" is not "bogus." Yours, most truly,

A. J. EDGERLY,

Late Lieut. Fourth New Hampshire Volunteers.

Certificate of the Moderator.

MANCHESTER, (N. H.) MARCH 28, 1863.

This shows that I am Moderator in Ward Six, in this city. That on the day of our annual election, March 10th, Lieut. A. J. Edgerly came into the ward room, presented his vote, and immediately retired. He did not remain in the room over five minutes. I did not see him distribute votes in the room, and I was so situated that I could have seen him had he been engaged in circulating them in the ward room.

JAMES O. ADAMS,

Moderator of ward 6, city of Manchester, N. H.

Our contemporaries generally, in noticing the above order, have fallen into an error by stating that Lieut. Edgerly was an officer of the New Hampshire regiment which was sent home from the Army of the Potomac "to recruit" just before the regular time prescribed for the election. That was the Second regiment, and not the Fourth. It passed through this city homeward bound on the 27th of February last. It is charged by the Concord Patriot and other Democratic journals of New Hampshire that hundreds of other officers and soldiers were furloughed and sent home about the same time. The Colonel of the Second Regiment has reported to the War Department that it is now ready for duty.

The following is the article of the "Independent Democrat" above alluded to. It appeared in its issue of the 2d instant:

"A HOWL.—The Patriot and other treason-sympathizing newspapers in our State are in a howl over the recent order from the War Department dismissing from the service an officer of the fourth regiment who was at home in this State actively engaged in attempting to procure a victory *for treason* in New Hampshire—a victory over which the rebels, whom he was commissioned to fight and not to aid, would have rejoiced as they did over the result of the elections in New York and some of the Western States. Let them howl. An officer who will aid and abet the election of men to places of trust and power who have from the outset opposed the 'coercion' of rebels, who have declared and acted out the declaration that they would never do any thing that can be interpreted as in any way supporting this war, is not fit to hold a commission on the Union side. His place is with the rebels, or in copperhead retiracy at home, amid the scorn and contempt of all loyal men."

The Patriot, in commenting on the above order, has the following remarks:

"The peculiar friends and organs of the Administration are daily and loudly calling for a 'united North,' and are deploring the fact that all citizens do not give cordial and energetic approval and support to the President. This order gives proof of the kind of unity of sentiment and action that is desired, and the way it is sought to be secured. One-half of the people of this State—the thirty-three thousand men who voted the Democratic ticket—are denounced, vilified, belied, and proscribed, in an order issued 'by direction of the President.' And for what? For their earnest and steadfast fidelity to the Constitution and their unshaken devotion to the Union. It is for that, and that alone. It is because they will not support measures which they believe will prove destructive to the Constitution and fatal to the dearest rights of free men. For this the President of the United States orders them to be publicly and officially denounced as 'copperheads' and 'rebels.' And more; by dismissing an officer for supporting the Democratic party, he declares that he does not want the services of Democrats in the army. This is the course adopted by the President to produce 'a united North!' By this course he expects to induce thirty-three thousand New Hampshire Democrats to abandon their cherished principles, their patriotic convictions, their heartfelt devotion to the Union, and become *moral traitors* by yielding assent and giving support to a policy which they regard as fatal to their country's welfare! If this is his expectation, he is doomed to disappointment."

SENATOR SUMNER.

We quoted a few days ago the appropriate and friendly remarks made on our civil war by the Duke of ARGYLE, a member of the present British Ministry, in his speech at the Edinburgh banquet on the first of April. Those remarks were prefaced by the following complimentary allusion to Mr. Senator SUMNER, the distinguished chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and had not met our eye when we made our citation from the speech of the Duke:

"Well, gentleman, these are two of the great wars to which I have referred. There is yet a third, that which on the other side of the Atlantic is raging now, on which I am anxious to add a single word. I can, indeed, say nothing on the political aspects of that question which has not been better said, and said with more authority, by my honorable friend at the head of the Government, and by Lord Russell in a speech he made last week in the House of Lords. But it does so happen, gentlemen, that, from circumstances to which I need not refer here, I have had much personal intercourse during the last fifteen years with a large number of the most distinguished citizens of America who have visited this country. Amongst others, I am proud to mention, as a dear and personal friend, that eminent man, Mr. Charles Sumner—a man who has devoted the affections of a noble heart, the powers of a noble intellect for many years to the prosecution of a noble cause. Well, he and others, allow me to say—for I know they will feel it comes from friendly quarters—seem to have been entertaining expectations in regard to the course of conduct of the British Government, which it is altogether impossible to realize. [Cheers.]"